

# School Librarian's Questions about Remote Instruction: Opportunities for LIS Educators

Jenna Kammer and Rene Burress

University of Central Missouri

[jkammer@ucmo.edu](mailto:jkammer@ucmo.edu), [burress@ucmo.edu](mailto:burress@ucmo.edu)

## ABSTRACT

Many school librarians turned to social media during the COVID-19 pandemic as a forum for interacting with other educators who were experiencing remote instruction for the first time. These social networks illuminated that many school librarians were prepared to work remotely, though they had many questions related to digitizing learning, digital policy, and digital ethics. This study uses discourse analysis to analyze the questions posed by school librarians on social media related to remote instruction to understand more about areas in which they sought support. The findings were compared with the current LIS curriculum to identify alignment with school library curriculum.

## ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

school library; curriculum; online learning

## AUTHOR KEYWORDS

school librarians; social media; curriculum, remote learning

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic led many public schools to quickly change their teaching delivery methods. The response from within each school and district varied, leading many school librarians to join social networking groups where they could learn from each other and find support. This paper explores the discourse that occurred within these social networking groups to understand how school librarians responded, what they knew about teaching remotely already, and what they wanted to learn. As LIS educators of school librarians, this information is useful to understand gaps in knowledge that school librarians have, particularly related to online teaching and learning, digital ethics and digital policy.

## Background

In fall of 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China (Anderson et al., 2020). Within several months, a global health emergency was issued as cases of SARS-CoV-2

spread internationally. The virus began to be referred to as COVID-19. By March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (2020) had classified COVID-19 as a pandemic. Shortly after, the White House announced a program called “15 Days to Slow the Spread” which recommended social distancing, including work from home, travel restrictions and limited social gatherings, as a strategy for limiting the spread of COVID-19 amongst the community. In response, many school districts closed their schools and began emergency remote instruction where teachers continued to teach students through physical distance. Many educators turned to social media to ask questions, learn about what others were doing and to share resources.

## **Literature Review**

This small study draws on the concept of question theory, which assumes that questions are an extension of curiosity and the beginning of a quest for new knowledge (Flammer, 1981). Asking informational questions can help a person to attain their goals as a person determines what to ask, and where to ask it. Ram (1991) explained that question-driven information seeking is the basis for learning. More specifically, when a person poses a question, they are essentially articulating a personal interest in developing knowledge in that area. Consequently, question generation and question answering is an attempt for a person to gain more understanding about the world. Ram suggested that the person with a question draws from their own prior experiences to form the question, then poses the questions to seek explanations. In addition, a question is driven by a person’s goals and interests. Therefore, questions play an essential role in understanding and learning.

Social media provides an opportunity to seek answers to questions from a diverse network of connections. Research in this area often refers to the concept of social capital, in that social networks allow users to tap into additional resources for personal or professional gains (Brooks et al, 2014; Gray et al, 2012; Ellison et al., 2013). Lampe et al. (2012) explained that professionals will use social media for interactions well-beyond simply socializing. They found that many Facebook users used the social networking platform as a source for information seeking and building social capital. Gray et al. (2012) also found that social media was used for informational and resource support. Many users will ask questions on Facebook when seeking explanations beyond what they are able to find within their local networks.

Professionals who participate in social media may see it as a safe place of gathering that is unrelated to their evaluation as educators (Veletsianos, 2013). Veletsianos explained that scholarly practices are enacted openly in social media, making them valuable for understanding the subculture of specific professional populations. For example, scholars who use social media do so to connect to others in their field of study, to crowdsource or to share aspects of their professional life that are usually private. Breeding (2009) also explained that social networks are important for career mobility and development for professionals. For librarians specifically, social networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, provide librarians with a place to gather without having to be together in person.

For teachers and other public school educators, social networks serve as a platform that can connect educators with others who perform similar jobs, but have different building cultures, policies and practices. While educators may have social networks that connect them with people they know in person from state professional associations or other local communities of practice, educators will also partake in social networks with other educators that they do not know. Baker-Doyle (2011) explained that these social networks are particularly important for crowdsourcing and finding answers to specific problems. In addition, social networks provide

significant support for educators, particularly in times of crisis. Similarly, Forte et al. (2012) suggested that social media networks could be useful for understanding more about the restrictions and limitations that educators may experience within their school systems, and how they are equipped to work within these systems.

Social media is also used to share information during times of crisis. De Araujo et al. (2018) explained that social media was essential for enabling collaboration and cooperation during past pandemics, like the Zika or H1N1 outbreaks. Specifically, social media, like Facebook or Twitter, serve as a fast and free way for professionals to share information globally. During pandemics, this is especially significant as some educators in the world may be experiencing the pandemic at different times. Al-garadi et al (2016) found that significant information is shared in social networks that make it possible to track pandemics, as well as practices that occurred during the pandemic. For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, educators in China were able to share their experiences with social distancing on social media to support educators in America who experienced social distancing several months later.

## **Method**

As we read and participated in social networks for school librarians who were preparing for remote instruction during COVID-19, we noticed that there were a significant number of questions from practicing school librarians related to specific content areas such as “Is it ok to do a read-aloud on Facebook live?” or “What are the best tools for delivering library instruction remotely?”. In addition, school librarians shared resources that they created or had found useful in their own communities. We saw this as an opportunity to examine the discourse in social networks for questions to ensure that our library and information services curriculum prepared our pre-service school librarians for the digital challenges of teaching remotely.

We developed two research questions to guide the study. Our research questions are:

1. What questions did school librarians have as they assisted their K-12 school in moving to remote instruction?
2. How do these questions align with nationally recognized school librarian curriculum?

This study uses discourse analysis to answer these questions while exploring social media postings in public Facebook groups for educators and school librarians. Eyesnbach and Till (2001) identified three different types of internet-based research methods: active analysis, passive analysis, and research self-identification. Passive analysis allows researchers to study information patterns on websites or interactions on discussion forums without the researchers being identified or involved in the forum. Franz et al. (2019) used passive analysis to study information patterns observed on Facebook or the interactions between users in existing Facebook groups. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required for this study as the data was already public information, however a determination of research form was submitted to IRB for review of the project.

## **Data Collection**

Our first step was to complete a sample discourse analysis for the study (Wildemuth and Perryman, 2009). To begin, we studied questions from a single group of school librarians on Facebook. The results of that initial analysis are presented in this paper. The next step was to identify additional Facebook groups we would study. We plan to study questions from five different Facebook groups for educators and school librarians, specifically looking at questions related to school librarians response to remote learning related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We

will study an undetermined number of posts between the dates of February 27th – May 30th, 2020 until we reach saturation. Data will be collected, and then organized for analysis, by placing posts in Google Sheets for ease of analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Once data is collected, we coded the data in a similar fashion. We started by identifying themes as they emerge and take shape as we examine the text (Wildemuth and Perryman, 2010). We then independently coded responses. First level codes aligned with the 23 components on the ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards (AASL, 2019). The second level of codes are researcher generated as relevant to the question. Once we have each finished coding, we will compare our results. Any contradictory codes were compiled and a third researcher was asked to independently code. The next step of discourse analysis was to search for patterns in the text, looking specifically for variations and contradictions. This required reading the data sets several times. Finally, the findings were compared with the current LIS curriculum (the 2019 ALA/AASL/CAEP School Librarian Preparation Standards) to identify alignment.

To validate our findings, we focused on the coherence and fruitfulness of our findings (Wildemuth and Perryman, 2010). To ensure coherence we looked for evidence that our outcomes provide clarity and focus. To ensure fruitfulness, we examined if our findings provided insight that clear implications for the improvement of practice for school librarians working remotely.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of discourse analysis is the potential for subjectivity to enter. Careful and repeated readings of the data, rigor in our coding categories. Another limitation is that posts that are related to resource sharing (ex: links to websites) and posts memes/jokes were not included in our data collection. We recognize that these are important aspects of online communities, but they are outside of the scope of this study. For this study we limited our research to questions only. Another limitation of this research is that researchers are unaware of the identities of each person who has made the post. We do not know if the person posting is a school librarian or someone interested in school library work. We do not know the poster's educational background. However, we concluded that it does not matter if the school librarian is certified or not, all questions from school librarians, or those serving in the capacity of the school librarian, are valid. School librarians who are not certified are often future graduate students in LIS programs. In addition, we are not able to know the conditions in which the school librarian has made the post to know if they are posting with the possibility of school closure, or if their school has been closed. This study does not include comments made on professional listservs that are limited to professional members. It only includes social media groups. Lastly, we realize that each school librarian within each district and school will have a different role in the COVID-19 pandemic. This research does not assume that all school librarians are experiencing the same work conditions.

### **Initial Findings**

For this paper, we conducted a preliminary analysis in one single Facebook group. All of the posts in a single private group on social media were analyzed as part of the preliminary phase of this study. The social media forum that we analyzed was called LM-Net, a popular Facebook

group for school librarians with over 3,000 members. This analysis includes posts made in this group between February 27, 2020 and May 30, 2020. There were 58 total posts. Of these posts, 17 included questions to the community (information-seeking) and 41 were posts that were intended to share information with the community (information-sharing). Of the 17 questions that were posed, two were unrelated to school closures of the COVID-19 pandemic so were removed from the analysis. The findings indicate that there were five major components in which questions fell (see Table 1). First, 47% of the questions asked by school librarians were related to providing library instruction or services online, including asking others how they were delivering library services, or what others were planning to do should their school move online. An additional 35% of the questions were related to reading engagement. In these posts, school librarians were asking others for recommendations related to specific topics to provide reading for specific students. One librarian actually recommended a book not to purchase because of its similarity to the pandemic and the school librarian sought others' feelings on that. Another major component discovered in the preliminary analysis is related to ethical use of information. Eighteen percent (18%) of questions asked others about copyright restrictions or sought information about resources where copyright was lifted for educational use during the pandemic.

Component	(n)	Example	SPA
Tech-Enabled Learning	5	We don't have the coronavirus in our area, at least not that I know of. But, I see a lot of social media posts about schools getting ready in case they need to make alternate plans. I'm at an elementary school. What can I do?	3.3,
Digitizing services	3		4.1,
Digitizing	2		5.4
learning			
Advocacy	2	For those of you that have already closed, what are some things you are going to work on while at home?	5.3
Librarian Role	2		
Reading Engagement	6	Could anyone suggest some books for 11-year-old girl who reads voraciously?	3.1
Recommendations	5		
Intellectual freedom	1		
Ethical Use of Information	3	Have I missed a list of author permission to stream read their books?	2.3, 5.4
Copyright	2		
Privacy	1		
Access	2	This PK-12 school librarian inherited thousands of books and is needing to sort them to find the YA titles vs Adult Fiction titles. I gave her some basic advice to help begin the sorting. Do you have any other suggestions?	4.1
Organization	2		
Information Resources	1	What are your top two recommendations for digital subscriptions?	4.2
Electronic resources			

Table 1. Preliminary findings from the LM-Net Facebook group

The results of this study are still ongoing at the time of submission as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. At this time, an initial discourse analysis of our sample indicates that school librarians are equally seeking help from others on digitizing library services and reader's advisory. School librarians were very interested in connecting young readers with the right books as they started social distancing. Future research will merge results from a variety of social media groups for analysis. Preliminary findings were also compared with the ALA/AASL/CAEP School Library Preparation Standards (AASL, 2019), which are the guiding standards for school library curriculum. All preliminary findings were able to be aligned with current standards.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The preliminary findings suggest that school librarians had many questions about delivering library services online. For most, delivering library services remotely was a new experience and Facebook was a forum for asking big questions, and getting quick responses. In addition, school librarians shared many relevant resources with each other. These resources were often shared with the intent of helping others with the understanding that others may be asking the same questions. However, many questions were unrelated to the pandemic, and were common librarian questions regardless of how services were delivered. The questions asked were often related to seeking more information about the experience of others. For example, a school librarian would post a broad question, asking for a variety of specific examples, to get ideas. The preliminary findings suggest that these questions fell into just a few categories related to digitizing instruction and resources, copyright, and continuing to build reading engagement with students while they are not physically present.

This data is important for library science educators. By studying the discourse of professional school librarians, it is possible to understand more about the critical skills needed to deliver services in a pandemic. Because these discussions happen publicly, they are also useful for determining what skills and knowledge school librarians need. This study also sought to understand how well our curriculum prepared school librarians to answer these questions. We compared our findings with the current school library curriculum. All major categories are included in the ALA/AASL/CAEP standards (AASL, 2019), suggesting that library schools who are ALA/AASL/CAEP accredited will prepare school librarians for teaching in remote environments. The preliminary findings of this study also indicate that there is some confusion amongst school librarians about digital policy and ethics in particular. However, using collaboration in social networks and the hive mind, many were able to find solutions (and also alert publishers that they had a need to lift copyright regulations during this particular crisis). Another gap in knowledge was related to advocacy. Many school librarians discussed issues related to lack of access to digital devices in their communities and how they were working with that. In the future, more training on developing access plans should be integrated into school library curriculum.

### REFERENCES

- AASL. (2019). ALA/AASL/CAEP School librarian preparation standards.  
[http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aasleducation/ALA\\_AASL\\_CAEP\\_School\\_Librarian\\_Preparation\\_Standards\\_2019\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aasleducation/ALA_AASL_CAEP_School_Librarian_Preparation_Standards_2019_Final.pdf)

- Al-garadi, M. A., Khan, M. S., Varathan, K. D., Mujtaba, G., & Al-Kabsi, A. M. (2016). Using online social networks to track a pandemic: A systematic review. *Journal of Biomedical Informatics*, 62, 1-11.
- Andersen, K.G., Rambaut, A., Lipkin, W.I., Holmes, E. & Garry, R. (2020). The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2. *Nature Medicine*. Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9.pdf>.
- Baker-Doyle, K. J. (2011). *The networked teacher: How new teachers build social networks for professional support*. Teachers College Press.
- Breeding, M. (2009). Social networking strategies for professionals. *Computers in Libraries*, 29(9), 29-31.
- Brooks, B., Hogan, B., Ellison, N., Lampe, C., & Vitak, J. (2014). Assessing structural correlates to social capital in Facebook ego networks. *Social Networks*, 38, 1-15.
- Bullingham, L., & Vasconcelos, A. C. (2013). 'The presentation of self in the online world': Goffman and the study of online identities. *Journal of Information Science*, 39(1), 101-112.
- Center for Disease Control (CDC). (March 12, 2020). Interim guidance for administrators of US K-12 schools and child care programs. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>.
- Center for Disease Control (CDC). (March 26, 2020). Situation summary. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary.html>.
- de Araujo, D. H. M., de Carvalho, E. A., da Motta, C. L. R., da Silva Borges, M. R., Gomes, J. O., & de Carvalho, P. V. R. (2018, August). Social Networks Applied to Zika and H1N1 Epidemics: A Systematic Review. In *Congress of the International Ergonomics Association* (pp. 679-692). Springer, Cham.
- Gray, R., Ellison, N. B., Vitak, J., & Lampe, C. (2013, February). Who wants to know? Question-asking and answering practices among Facebook users. In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 1213-1224).
- Eysenbach, G., & Till, J. (2001). Ethical issues in qualitative research on Internet communities. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 323(7321), 1103-1105.
- Flammer, A. (1981). Towards a theory of question asking. *Psychological Research*, 43(4), 407-420.
- Forte, A., Humphreys, M., & Park, T. (2012, May). Grassroots professional development: How teachers use Twitter. In *Sixth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*.

- Franz, D., Marsh, H. E., Chen, J. I., & Teo, A. R. (2019). Using Facebook for qualitative research: A brief primer. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 21(8), e13544. <https://doi.org/10.2196/13544>.
- Gray, R., Ellison, N. B., Vitak, J., & Lampe, C. (2013, February). Who wants to know? Question-asking and answering practices among Facebook users. In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 1213-1224).
- Lampe, C., Vitak, J., Gray, R., & Ellison, N. (2012, May). Perceptions of facebook's value as an information source. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 3195-3204).
- Ram, A. (1991). A Theory of questions and question asking. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 1(3-4), 273-318.
- Sievers, K., Wodzicki, K., Aberle, I., Keckeisen, M., & Cress, U. (2015). Self-presentation in professional networks: More than just window dressing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50, 25-30.
- Veletsianos, G. (2013). Open practices and identity: Evidence from researchers and educators' social media participation. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(4), 639-651.
- The White House. (March 16, 2020). 15 days to slow the spread. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/15-days-slow-spread/>.
- Wildemuth & Perryman (2010). Discourse analysis. In Wildemuth (Ed), *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science* (320-328). Libraries Unlimited.
- World Health Organization. (2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19-11 March 2020. Geneva, Switzerland.